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LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO.

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

1122

# The Degradation of Woman

Joseph McCabe



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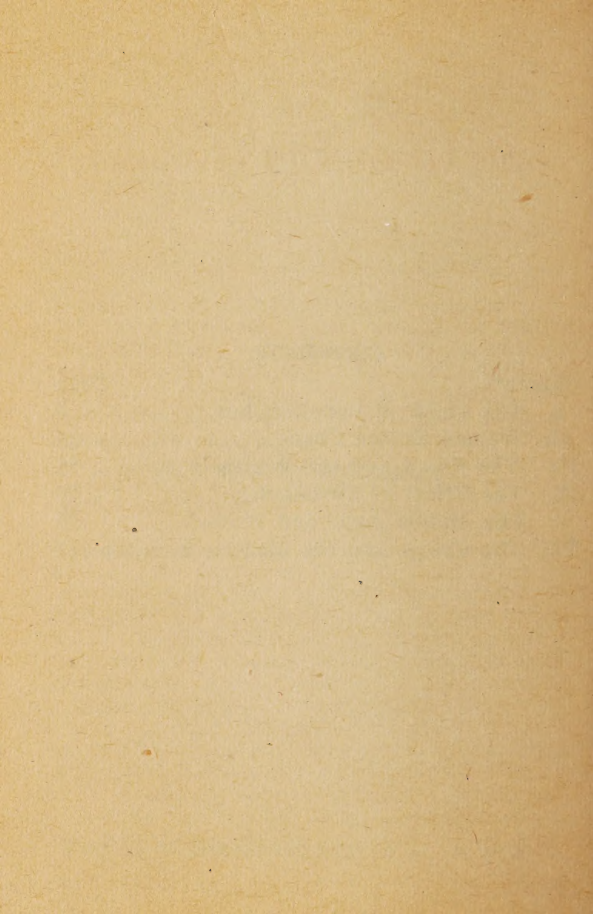
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GIRARD, KANSAS

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# THE DEGRADATION OF WOMAN

## CHAPTER I

### THE CLAIM OF THE CHURCHES

An editorial from one of New York's greatest dailies reaches me just as I begin this book. It informs us that religion is so widely held, so sturdily and vitally cherished, in the United States that there is a prospect of the country opening up a new religious epoch. It seems that religion is still "one of the primary creative forces" of the United States. We learn that we are "far from the Deists of the Revolutionary era" and from the "naive irreverences of Robert Ingersoll."

I wish at least that we were far from the days when journalists and statesmen talk bunk, deliberate bunk, about religion. The Deistic attitude toward Christianity was shared by only a few thousand highly educated people in the Revolutionary era; but one-half the population of America is now alienated from Christianity. The writer knows that. He himself remarks that in 1924 "the organized churches had a membership of 46,142,210." Are there any *unorganized* churches in America? In any case, this figure represents little more than a third of the population.

As to "church activities," men threatened with bankruptcy are usually very active. To say, "Never has the church stood higher in the

respect of the American people or been a more potent contributor to national progress," is a lie. The life of every city in America, four-fifths of the books published in America, half the sermons preached in America, and half the plays presented, tell the opposite.

It is respectable to say these smooth insincurities in the press of Britain and America. It is disreputable, a mark of bad taste or inferior sentiment, to tell the truth about religion. Religion, the sole fount of "truthfulness," is fenced by more untruths than any other belief or institution in the life of man. To lie in sport is ungentlemanly. To lie in business is mean. To lie in politics is futile. But to lie in religion is a service to the nation.

That is the pretext of all this insincerity. The genuine motive of it is different, and need not be discussed. The pretext is that Christianity has created the civilization of the world and is necessary to the maintenance of that civilization. A little pragmatism goes a long way in such matters. What is truth? It is an ethereal, unpractical question. The maintenance of the idealism created for us, of our lofty standards, of the integrity and fearlessness of our press, of the uncompromising truthfulness of our pulpit, of . . .

You know the phrases. And I take this as my text because in this Little Blue Book I begin the consideration of the *utility* of religion. I am going to show that we ought to say *futility*. I have dealt with the question of its truth. We have studied the origin and evolution of all religion. We have examined the civilizations



which preceded the influence of Christianity. We have seen the real origin of Christianity and the real reasons why it became the religion of Europe and of most of the world. (See Little Blue Books Nos. 1007, 1008, 1030, etc.) It is not an edifying story. But it is a comparatively mild and inodorous story when contrasted with that which I am now going to tell: what Christianity did for the world.

To begin with I am taking four definite issues of paramount importance. We ask what Christianity did for woman, for the worker, for the child, and for moral or social life. Four Little Blue Books give the reply; in facts and figures, not in rhetoric.

No one will suggest that these four issues are chosen because the reply is easy. It is easy. There will be no need to strain evidence, to use disputed historical statements. The recognized facts of the world's evolution since the fifth century allow only one answer. Yet it is precisely in these fields that the supposed service of Christianity is sought. H. G. Wells at least knew what was claimed when, in his famous world-history, he said that Christianity freed the slave and gave the world schools. Christians really believe that. For the other issues you have only to consider the weekly prognostications of the dire fate in prospect for woman and for morals and refinement if Christianity perishes. All over the Christian world elderly spinsters are implored to make their checks larger on the ground of the horrors that threaten them when the clergy are no longer here to protect their virtue. All over the world

it is claimed that the new religion lifted woman to a higher position.

The circumstances of our time have given a special interest to this last issue; and they have at the same time made the Christian claim seem, to every thoughtful man and woman, more ironic than ever.

I am what is called a Feminist. Thirty years ago I left a monastery and began a sane human existence. Within two or three years, I find, I was defending the rights of women. Twenty-five years ago I sat in the lobby of the British Parliament with two of the oldest women-fighters, awaiting the issue of a "Suffrage Bill." The cause was not then respectable, and I was the only writer who associated with them. Now it has the blessing of the church; and my services are not required or mentioned. It is successful. Only a few weeks ago I attended a great women's meeting in the central park of London. There were a hundred orators, and half of them introduced Jesus and the Bible. Church banners glittered on the platforms. Pretty parsons evoked ripples of laughter and tears of sentiment. And I hung, unknown, on the fringes of the great crowds and smiled—rather cynically.

Some of us can remember the forty years' fight, or forty years of the fight for the elementary rights of women. Why had this fight to be undertaken at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century? Had the age of Voltaire brought some worsening of the position of women? Were these injustices which we fought a creation of our "materialistic

age"? What is the simple meaning of the fact that during 1850 years of the Era of Redemption there was no struggle, and that the struggle began and was carried to a successful conclusion in the Era of Skepticism? At least there is no dispute about that fact; and nobody above the age of twenty is ignorant of it.

Yet the clergy and religious writers are able, unrebuked, to tell women all over the world that Christianity has been the best friend they ever had. The Suffrage? That is a political matter, they say: a detail in a necessarily slow political evolution. Very few men had the suffrage in Europe a century ago. None had it a few centuries earlier. (It does not occur to them or to the women to wonder *why* no one had the suffrage.) The political sentiment of the times was for despotic monarchy. Religion was not consulted. And so on.

The clergy are poor sociologists. You have to remind them that it is not merely a question of the suffrage. Let me put the position in the words of one of the most respected of American women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She is describing the wrongs of woman in what was then, in 1850, the most enlightened city of the United States, Boston:

Woman could not hold any property, either earned or inherited. If unmarried, she was obliged to place it in the hands of a trustee, to whose will she was subject. If she contemplated marriage, and desired to call her property her own, she was forced by law to make a contract with her intended husband by which she gave up all title or claim to it. A woman, either married or unmarried, could hold no office of trust or power. She was not a person. She was not recognized as

a citizen. She was not a factor in the human family. She was not a unit, but a zero, in the sum of civilization. . . . The status of a married woman was little better than that of a domestic servant. By the English Common Law [in force in Boston] her husband was her lord and master. He had the sole custody of her person and of her minor children. He could punish her "with a stick no bigger than his thumb," and she could not complain against him. . . . The common law of the State held man and wife to be one person, but that person was the husband. He could by will deprive her of every part of his property, and also of what had been her own before marriage. He was the owner of all her real estate and her earnings. The wife could make no contract and no will, nor, without her husband's consent, dispose of the legal interest of her real estate. . . . She did not own a rag of her clothing. She had no personal rights and could hardly call her soul her own. Her husband could steal her children, rob her of her clothing, neglect to support the family; she had no legal redress. If a wife earned money by her labor, the husband could claim the pay as his share of the proceeds. (*History of Women's Suffrage*, vol. III, p. 290.)

The comfortable matron who now listens to mellifluous assurances from her Episcopal or Methodist pulpit ought to know these things. Let her imagine herself in this position of her grandmother. What a degradation, she will exclaim!

Well, madam, I am going to show you that the degradation was brought upon woman by Christianity. You are going to see, if you will condescend to read an "infidel" book (which, of course, you won't: the preacher will see to that), that Christianity found woman free and respected, and degraded her to the position described by Mrs. Cady Stanton; and that the degradation was lifted from her, mainly owing

to the work of "infidels," in this age which seems to you so materialistic and menacing to women.

What, then, is the Christian claim? On what sort of evidence is it based?

Bless you, rhetorical claims are not, as a rule, based upon evidence. Evidence is "cold." Facts are rather boring, sometimes actually disagreeable. What we love is sonorous phraseology, delivered with eupeptic dogmatism or original bluntness, or softened with a tender glow of sentiment which it has taken many hours to make natural and spontaneous. What we love is the vague insinuation of horrors in the pagan past or the pagan future which religious delicacy forbids us to make more explicit. A sermon is not a mere lecture. We go to church, not to learn, but to be uplifted.

Some years ago I was invited to write a book (*The Bible in Europe*) on the question of the precise contribution of the Christian religion to the civilization of the world. Queen Victoria, not a learned person, though not as stupid as most members of the British royal family, had said that the Bible was the source of England's greatness, and this authoritative assurance still reverberates from the pulpits. Since I do not care to waste either my own time or that of my readers, I asked a friend to ask a relative who is a learned divine what the Church really claimed to have done.

But my friend incautiously said that the information was for *me*, and the answer was very guarded. They do not, it seems, claim to

have created civilization. There are specific contributions—there is the general sentiment of charity and justice—there is the refinement of morals . . . in short, I was referred to certain standard Christian works, and I read them. Dr. Fairbairn, in particular, was recommended, and I learned from him that early Christianity put a “halo” about woman, “taught us reverence for woman.” We shall see. Others contended that the pagan had regarded woman merely as “an instrument of his lust,” and Christianity changed all that. We shall see. Others felt sure that the apotheosis of Mary must have uplifted the whole sex. We shall see. Others, a little behind the times, ventured to quote the heroic virtue of Agnes, Catherine, Cecilia, and all the other dead myths.

In short, no religious writer, in talking of the change or improvement which Christianity is claimed to have effected, accurately sets out the position of woman before 400 A. D. (when the world was driven into the Church) and the position of woman, say, in 800 A. D. I doubt if there is a religious writer capable of doing it.

However that may be, their followers never press them to do it. What a mass of laborious research I should have been spared in the last thirty years had I remained a priest! But I have never been able to overcome a kind of prejudice of mine, that statements of fact ought to be based upon facts. So you know what to expect here. Two chapters will give you the facts about woman's position before the fourth



century of the Christian Era. Then two chapters will show, in the prosy language of history, what her position was after the fourth century. It is an original method, no doubt; but there are points in its favor. One is that you can draw your own conclusion.

## CHAPTER II

## WOMAN BEFORE CHRIST

In this chapter we will consider the position of woman before Christ was born. The Greek and the Roman woman we will take, in the next chapter, as contemporaries of Christ; and, of course, there we must proceed with caution. A preacher first abuses the pagan Romans, then, when you prove their greatness, he points out that Jesus was already in the world and in some subtle way, by some imperceptible means. . . . But not even the most ingenious apologist will attempt to prove that the position of woman in ancient Egypt, Babylon, or Crete was lit by the light and uplifted by the spiritual force of a gospel which did not yet exist. Were these nations not notoriously in darkness and the shadow of death?

But, says the preacher, politely, do not forget that there was already a foregleam of Christianity in the world. A partial revelation had been communicated to the Hebrews. And the Hebrews were brought into contact with the Babylonians and may, by their superior ideals, have moderated the grossness of pagan conduct. People really do say these things in the churches.

In the year 586 B. C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried away most of the Jews of the better class to his great city on the Euphrates. Let us imagine the dark-eyed maid Rebecca or the portly

matron Susannah blinking in the light of the brilliant metropolis and then inquiring what the position of woman was.

We know well what the position of woman was in Judea. It is pithily put in *Leviticus* xii, 1-5. This book had in the year 586 not yet been forged, it is true, but it clearly gives an old law:

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and borne a man child; then she shall be *unclean seven days*; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.

And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying *three and thirty days*; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.

But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean *two weeks*, as in her separation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying *three-score and six days*.

Pretty ironic to describe this bit of primitive tribal barbarism and superstition as a special revelation from the Most High! It just expresses woman's position under this "foregleam of Christianity."

The female was an inferior creature. She never had a lover or chose a husband. Her parents handed her over to a youth who became her very despotic lord and master. She was "unclean" about ten times in twenty years, as a rule, to say nothing of shorter periods. She had no property, no personality. Her husband could divorce her when he willed; she

could not divorce him when she willed. Her husband could take a second wife or a concubine or dally with painted ladies. Rebecca had to disguise herself as a prostitute if she wanted a change (*Genesis xxxviii 14*). And when she had fulfilled the whole Law, she was peppered with spiteful aphorisms (*Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, etc.*) about her malice and odiousness.

Rebecca would not find this inspired code in Babylon. She would see the women living under the code of King Khammurabi, which the old monarch refuses to ascribe to any god. And, as laws are very solid documents, let us quote at once a few clauses about woman's position, to contrast with the Jewish law:

127. If a man has pointed the finger against a priestess or the wife of another man unjustifiably, that man shall be thrown before the judge, and his brow shall be branded.

134. If a man has been taken prisoner, and there is no food in his house, and his wife enters the house of another; then that woman bears no blame.

137. If a man has set his face to divorce a concubine who has borne him children, or a wife who has presented him with children; then he shall give back to that woman her dowry, and he shall give her the usufruct of field, garden, and property, and she shall bring up her children.

138. If a man divorce his spouse who has not borne him children, he shall give to her all the silver of the bride-price, and restore to her the dowry which she brought from the house of her father.

139. If there was no bride-price, he shall give her one mina of silver for the divorce.

142. If a woman hate her husband, and says, "Thou shalt not possess me," the reason for her dislike shall be inquired into. If she is careful and has no fault, but her husband takes himself away and neglects her; then that woman is not to blame

She shall take her dowry and go back to her father's house.

171b. The spouse shall take her dowry, and the settlement which her husband made her and wrote in a tablet for her, and she shall dwell in the domicile of her husband. While she lives she shall enjoy it; she may not sell it for silver, but after her it is her children's.

Not bad for the year 2100 B. C., is it? In fact, immeasurably superior to the Christian law under which Christian women were living in England and New England 4000 years afterward, and far better than the Jewish law of 500 B. C.

Yet this is the oldest law of Babylon. Rebecca would, in short, find women as free and respected in Babylon in 586 B. C. as they are in Boston today. I show in another book (*Morals in Ancient Babylon*, Little Blue Book No. 1076) how the deciphering of the literature of ancient Babylon has completely discredited those picturesque ideas of the vice of the great city which are still used to give purple patches to sermons. So far were the Babylonians from enjoying a remarkable looseness in sexual relations that they incurred sentence of death by adultery. We will hope that their practice was not as savage as their law. And there was not one law for the man and one for the woman (as in Christendom). The man and woman were bound together and thrown into the Euphrates. A man was burned alive for rape. A mother and son were burned alive for incest. A man was drowned for intercourse with his daughter-in-law. A retired priestess was burned alive if she went to a wine-shop for a drink. No woman

was forced to prostitute herself at the temple, and there was probably no temple of that kind in Babylon. The marriage-contracts, of which we have a large number, commonly guarantee that the bride is a virgin.

In other words, if we were to return tomorrow to the "morals of ancient Babylon," as preachers somberly announce that we may if their income is cut off, a woman would find herself protected from man's "lust" by a series of drastic laws which no section of Christendom ever knew! Such is the imbecility of these dismal prophecies about the future of the race. When at last the truth, which has been known to scholars for decades, breaks through the dense mists of the religious world, we shall have the Christian matrons of America *demanding* a return to pagan morals and the wicked people of America (secretly supported by the clergy) violently resisting the proposal.

Woman was, at any rate, quite free in ancient Babylonia. Her rights were splendidly protected by law. She held property as legally as man did. She was not an inferior creature; she had no periods of uncleanness. She did not miss the Christian Mary, because Ishtar was one of the greatest deities of Babylonia and Assyria, and at least in later Babylon was an ethical deity. Woman had, of course, no vote, as there were no votes for either sex. In a word, she was in every respect the equal of man, free to own and control her own property and therefore be independent, able to divorce an unworthy or even merely neglectful husband at any time, protected against any encroach-



ments upon her rights by other women. That is what Rebecca, coming from the female slavery of Judea, would find in benighted Babylon.

And woman was just as free, equal, independent, and respected in ancient Egypt. Every single authority on ancient Egypt will tell you that. Flinders Petrie even observes that in the home the husband was merely "a sort of boarder, a visitor, who had to keep up the establishment." Maspero, another of the chief authorities, puts it that the husband was "a privileged guest": that the many tomb-inscriptions we have show that the wife was "the beloved of her husband and the mistress of the house." There was no "stick as thick as a man's thumb" in the corner, no exploitation or bullying, no appropriation of her earnings or property. In the *Maxims of Ptah-Hotep*, a middle-class treatise of four thousand years ago or more, it is said: "She will be doubly attached if the chain is sweet to her." Of course there was a chain, a contract of marriage; but it was mutual. "Make glad her heart during the time that thou hast," the counsel to the husband ran; and even in case of misconduct he was urged: "Be kind to her for a season, send her not away, let her have food to eat."

Polygamy was permitted in Egypt, but a wife could, and did, stipulate in her marriage-contract that there should be none. It is one of the "higher religions," Mohammedanism (in this respect borrowing from Judaism), which has brought degradation upon the woman of Egypt. For the four thousand years of life of the old pagan civilization she was the equal of

man in all respects. She could not only bring an action on her own account in court, but she could plead. She could practice medicine. She had a great career as priestess; and the female deity Isis was one of the most famous and revered, and in later times one of the most ethical, in the pantheon. The Christian Madonna and child is based most particularly upon the popular Egyptian representation of Isis and Horus. Mary is an understudy of Isis and Ishtar.

As in Babylonia, there was no political opportunity for either sex, since the form of government was a despotic monarchy, so that woman had no special injustice here. In the palace she was treated as an equal, and there were queens who made great names in Egyptian history. It was most probably Queen Tu, the mother of Amen-Hotep IV, who brought about the religious revolution which substituted the worship of one God for the polytheism of the Egyptian temples.

The beginning of civilization is dated by different authorities at various periods between 3000 and 4000 B.C. This means that the stretch of time during which Egypt and Babylon were the chief representatives of civilization is far greater than the whole of subsequent history; and during all that time woman was free, independent and the equal of man. She was "treated with justice and respect."

The only other civilizations were those of the Cretans, the Hittites, and the Chinese. The Cretan is the most interesting, since it began as early as the great kingdoms of Egypt and

Mesopotamia. We have not yet discovered the key to the Cretan language, and our knowledge is therefore imperfect; but if there is one point on which the authorities are agreed, and upon which they feel justified in expressing an opinion, it is the position of woman. The fact that Crete had no male deity, but only the mother-earth goddess, would dispose us to expect to find woman in an excellent position. That sex cannot be held inferior which is the sex of the deity.

But we have ample indications of the fact. The frescoes on the walls of the Cnossos palace plainly show that there was no oriental confinement of women. They are depicted enjoying themselves on the terrace of the great palace just as ladies do on the terrace of the modern mansion. The impression of every student of Cretan remains is that women probably had in the Cretan civilization an even better position than they had in Egypt and Babylonia.

In regard to the Hittite civilization we can say nothing. The inscriptions cannot be deciphered, and we must leave it out of consideration. As it was not nearly so old or so important a civilization as the preceding three, this need not concern us. Nor need we linger over the position of woman in China. The Chinese civilization is a thousand years younger than those of the West, and on account of its complete isolation until modern times it need not be considered here.

We are concerned with that particular evolution of the human race into which Christianity

entered as an influence. Looking back, in the light of what I have said, upon that evolution, and taking the position of woman as a test of civilization, we should have to divide the whole into two eras, the era of light and justice and the era of darkness and injustice; and it is an elementary historical truth to say that the era of light is the period *before Christ* and the era of darkness the time which we proudly call the *Christian Era*.

It is also an elementary and uncontroverted historical truth that the recovery of woman, the removal of her wrongs, did not begin until the Christian domination of the world was profoundly shaken and reduced; it made progress in proportion as the Churches grew weaker; it received no assistance whatever from Christianity; and it was brought to a triumphant issue only when the majority of men in the cities of the world had thrown off their allegiance to Christianity. These are statements of fact, not rhetoric. I have shown this for the period before Christ, and later chapters will establish the rest. And it would hardly be possible to frame a more deadly reply than these facts give to the claim that Christianity has been "woman's best friend."

There is only one qualification to be made in this general statement. Egypt and Babylon did not bring the story of woman's equality down to the beginning of the Christian Era; and the influence of Christianity, on the other hand, did not begin until about the end of the fourth century. This leaves a period of eight or nine centuries between what I have called the

era of light and the era of darkness. That period is filled with the stories of Greece and Rome, and we have next to see whether it may not have been these which inaugurated the degradation of woman, and whether the Church did not simply inherit an unjust social order for which it was not responsible. The further question, what the effect of the destruction of the Roman civilization by the northern barbarians was likely to be, will be considered in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER III

## THE GREEK AND ROMAN WOMAN

Let us say at once that in the Greek and Roman civilizations woman had not the position of equality and freedom which she had had in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and apparently, Crete. In different strains of the human family a different attitude was adopted toward woman. In the Semitic race, to which the Hebrews belonged, a harsh and masterful attitude was evolved, whereas amongst the Egyptians and Mesopotamians woman seems to have been the community; not because she was the mother, but because her personality was as justly recognized as that of the man.

In the Indo-Persian-European family the attitude was totally different in different branches. The slavery of the Hindu woman of recent times is not, perhaps, her original situation; but there must from the first have been a domineering attitude toward women. In the Teutonic branch of the family, on the contrary, woman was, as I will tell later, highly respected. The Greeks and Romans come between these two extremes. Amongst the early Romans, especially, the man had a quite despotic power over the woman; though it was not abused, as one finds it abused amongst the Hebrews or Hindus, and it soon disappeared.

No doubt if we could trace the circumstances in which each of these branches of the human family slowly advanced toward civilization, we



should easily understand the different attitudes. Human evolution is as surely guided by material conditions as a river is by the course which physical conditions prescribe for it. But we can no longer trace this evolution. At one time it was widely thought that in the semi-civilized state of the race there was a general, if not universal, rule of the mothers over the community, a "matriarchate." There are local traces of such a rule, but I do not think that any sociologist now believes it to have been at any time the general, or a very widespread, institution.

The earlier attitude of the Greeks toward woman does not concern us much. She was in a position of dependence and inequality, but certainly not of degradation. Polygamy was abandoned before the historical period opened, and another change of which we have some trace improved the lot of the wife. Originally it had been the custom, as in many savage and barbaric tribes, for the wooer to make a present to the girl's father. Very early this was changed into a gift from her father, so that she was no longer a chattel, an article to be bargained for and bought.

In the earliest Greek literature, in fact, woman already has a position of respect, if not honor. Some noble types of wives are described in the Homeric poems, and the great tragedians of the earlier part of the brilliant career of Athens have given the world some of the finest types of womanhood in all literature: not scheming assassins like Judith, not bloodless and loveless automata like the Christian saints

and ascetics, but normal women bearing their part in life bravely and honorably and sweetly.

When the full light of history falls upon the Greek community we find woman in a position that certainly would not accord with modern standards. A special and secluded part of the home was set apart for the women, and, while their excursions from the home were restricted, the men had full liberty. Athens and most of the Greek city-states were democracies, yet woman had no part whatever in the political life. Her place was the home.

Girls, it is true, had a life of comparative freedom and, one feels that they would say, happiness. They had excellent athletic training, music, games, and graceful dancing. The old idea, that a woman was a man's property, to be carefully guarded from a defilement that lowered her value, persisted; but there was no note of contempt, no insinuation, as in Judea, that she was unclean and useful only as a breeder of men. She was the companion of man; but it was understood that politics and war were not her concern. She was excluded from public life.

Quite early in Greek life, however, a movement began for the removal of whatever wrongs and disabilities she had. The *Medea* of the great tragedian Euripides is one of the most poignant presentments of the case for woman that was ever given to the world. Its exaggeration is so great, yet so sincerely and profoundly felt, that no woman-genius could have penned a more formidable complaint. Already, also, the Greeks had the poetry of Sappho, a

brilliant practical demonstration of woman's independence. The historian Herodotus also shows, Mahaffy says, a "fair and gentle attitude toward women."

In fact, in the best days of Athenian prosperity there was a "woman movement" akin to that of modern times. Professor Mahaffy suggests that it was contact with the Persians in Asia Minor which had moved the better-class Athenians—wives and daughters of the workers were, he says, "sufficiently free"—to enclose their wives and daughters in something like the oriental fashion. That it was not due to any general contempt of women he proves by quoting a case in which two married women, prisoners of war, sent a complaint to Athens against an Athenian general. The complaint was, he says, received by the Athenian democracy "with such an outburst of indignation that he [the general] committed suicide in open court to avoid the sentence." Such complaints were not listened to in Europe during the World War.

I remark in another book (Little Blue Book, No. 1078) upon the fairness of the Rev. Professor Mahaffy, a high authority, in dealing with the morals of the Greeks (*Social Life in Greece*). He shows with the same fairness that a movement for removing the disabilities of women began in Athens several centuries before Christ was born.

It seems, as we should expect, to have been connected with the famous Aspasia, one of the most brilliant and most respected ladies of antiquity, a friend of the leading writers and

statesmen of Athens. The comedian Aristophanes ridiculed the movement, but the philosopher Plato defended it, as, apparently, Socrates had done before him. We may, in fact, infer that this "women's rights" movement of 2,200 years ago had very solid support amongst the educated men of Athens, and it was clearly of sufficient importance for the greatest of the comedians to devote two plays to it, the *Lysistrata* and the *Ecclesiazusae* (a word which might almost be translated "suffragettes"). In the latter play Aristophanes ironically describes the women of Athens donning male dress and taking over the work of making laws and reforming the "man-made" State.

Thus the fight which agitated England and America in the last part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century really began and reached important proportions, in Athens in the fourth century before Christ! It was the mass of the people who ridiculed the movement as modern crowds ridiculed the suffragettes. Educated men realized that, although it was unquestionably part of the ideal of a Greek gentleman to see that his wife was happy, the position of woman was unjust. Plato eloquently pleaded that woman had, though in a less developed form, the same faculties as man, and ought to have the same education. Her supposed unfitness for political life he caustically ridiculed. Epicurus, who closes the long line of Greek thinkers, had no interest in politics. He urged both men and women to avoid the corrupt and turbulent life of politics and cultivate a sober tranquillity.

Within the limits of his own ideal, however, he welcomed men and women on equal terms.

Thus Greece, to which religious writers appeal as an example of the antagonism of the most brilliant of the pagan civilizations to woman proves to be exactly the contrary. For three or four thousand years, in Crete, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, woman had been free and respected. Then for a few centuries we find her in Greece, not degraded or vilely used, for nearly every great Greek writer treats her with respect, but certainly in a position of dependence and inferiority. But at the very dawn of the Golden Age of Athens a movement for her emancipation begins, and it has the support of all the best elements of Greek life.

Unfortunately, Athens was ruined before the movement could reach a successful issue. Yet its ideals continued. The chief Greek writer about the time of Christ, Plutarch, maintained that woman was mentally and morally equal to man, and ought to have, as Plato had said, the same education. He denied that the moral law should be interpreted more liberally in the case of man than of woman. And the last glimpse that we have in history of Greek culture, before it is entirely lost in a Christianized and barbarized world, is a picture of the philosopher Hypatia taking a leading part in the life of the great city of Alexandria and by her culture and personality rising high above all her contemporaries.

The murder of Hypatia by a Christian mob is a fitting allegory of the murder of the new hope of women by the new religion. That may

seem a harsh sentence, but even the broad historical facts must give the modern Christian woman ground for reflection. A movement for the emancipation of woman from grievances far lighter than those of a century ago began in Greece nearly 2,300 years ago. It gathered force and was endorsed by the most influential Greek writers. But it completely disappeared when Christianity became the religion of Europe, and it did not reappear until skepticism about Christianity spread through the civilized world.

We shall see that the prejudice which this broad fact creates against the new religion is fully confirmed by a study of Christian teaching. First, however, we must carefully consider the position of woman in the Roman civilization with which Christianity came into actual contact.

It is usual in religious literature to divide Roman history into two parts: a first part, until a century or two before the birth of Christ, in which woman was very virtuous but a slave, and a later part in which she was free but very wicked.

This generalization is as false as most of the other "historical" statements upon which the supposed service to the race of the new religion is based. The women of the Roman Republic (in its earlier centuries) were assuredly very chaste and virtuous. The names of some of them rank with the names of Christian saints. But, just as the chastity of the saint is a kind of commercial venture, the price of a colossal reward in heaven, so the virtue of the early Roman maid or matron may be attributed to



fear of the lash or the knife. The women were the property of the men. They ranked with the children. The law did not enter a Roman's house. He had power of life and death over his wife, his children, and his slaves. Small wonder that the wife and daughters were very "virtuous."

Yet even here woman was far better treated than she was in Judea. One of the Roman historians, Valerious Maximus, makes the almost incredible claim that there was no divorce in the Roman Republic for 520 years after its foundation! The Jewish civilization—the real, not the legendary, civilization of the Hebrews—was practically a contemporary of the Roman, and a record of woman's experience in the two would be an instructive document. Roman women were not confined in special quarters of the house, were not forbidden to go out to dine or to the theater, and had not separate places in the temple. They were treated with the greatest respect at home and abroad.

Moreover, the tyranny of the older Roman custom broke down long before the time of Christ. Greece had been civilized only a few centuries—not 1,500 years, like Christian Europe—when it started a movement for the emancipation of woman. Rome, similarly, was civilized only some three or four centuries when its women began a formidable movement for emancipation and admission to political life.

In the second century before Christ scenes curiously like those of the suffrage-struggle of modern times were witnessed in Rome. Crowds of women obstructed the way of the reactionary

Senator and loudly demanded their rights. And I may add that their greatest opponent, Cato the Elder, the personification of the old Roman discipline, is nevertheless reported to have said: "A man who beats his wife or his children lays impious hands on that which is most holy and most sacred in the world." As to property, Roman women had already, in 215 B. C., become so wealthy that a law—a special war measure—was passed restricting their property.

The suffrage, or a share in political life, was not won in Rome because long before the birth of Christ the men themselves lost, or surrendered, their political power. The Republic became an Empire. There were still municipal elections, and, as "election addresses" which were found in the ruins of the buried city of Pompeii informed us, women took an active part in these. In the provinces, the inscriptions show, women sometimes held high municipal offices. At Rome there were "women's clubs" (*conventus matronarum*) where the affairs of the city and the State were keenly discussed. A Roman woman could hold property just as well as a man, and was often very rich and independent. Men, in fact, grumbled (as in ancient Egypt) that their wives charged an excessive interest on the money they lent their husbands!

Not only the later and more liberal ideas of the Greek philosophers, but the humanitarian precepts of the Stoic ethic, had entered into the blood of Rome and softened the harshness of its old discipline. "The old law," says the famous jurist Sir Henry Maine, "had fallen

into complete discredit and was verging on extinction." The end of the first century and greater part of the second century of the Christian Era were a well recognized "Stoic Period" at Rome, and the Emperors, a splendid series of monarchs, allowed the Stoic lawyers to infuse their humanitarian ideals into the law concerning woman and the slave. Education was, as we shall see, organized on a most generous basis, and philanthropy covered Italy with orphanages and homes for the aged and ailing. "Anyone, who knows the inscriptions," says Sir Samuel Dill, "may be inclined to doubt whether private benefactions under the Antonines were less frequent and generous than in our own day." (*Roman Society from Nero to Aurelius* p. 191).

We will return to this later. But this "great Stoic doctrine of the brotherhood and equality of men," as Sir Samuel Dill calls it, completed the work of the emancipation of woman from the tyranny of the old institutions. Sir Henry Maine, perhaps the highest authority on Roman law, says of Gaius, one of the famous Stoic lawyers of the time:

The great jurisconsult himself scouts the popular apology offered for it [the old law] in the moral inferiority of the female sex, and a considerable part of his volume is taken up with descriptions of the numerous expedients, some of them displaying extraordinary ingenuity, which the Roman lawyers had devised for enabling women to defeat the ancient rules. Led by their theory of Natural Law, the jurisconsults had evidently at this time assumed the equality of the sexes as a principle of their code of equity. (*Ancient Law*, p. 154.)

Woman had, in short, just been freed from

the grievances which older Greek and Roman tradition had laid on her at the time when the Christian Church was spreading through the Roman world. By the end of the second century she was, socially and legally, as free as the modern woman; and she remained free to the end of the Empire. When the influence of Christianity began, in the fourth century, paganism had recovered from its temporary injustice to woman. Throughout the range of Roman law, which means throughout civilization at the time, there was no degradation or subjection of woman. Yet fifteen centuries of degradation and subjection followed.

Could there be a more ironic comment on the preacher's eloquent and constant plea—that Christianity brought into the world the doctrine of the brotherhood of men? It was precisely "the great *Stoic* doctrine of the brotherhood and equality of men" (as the Protestant historian calls it) which had emancipated woman. It was the new Christian doctrine of the *inequality* of the sexes which degraded her.

The Christian scholars who claim that at least the new religion taught men a "reverence" for woman are almost completely ignorant of the facts. They rely only on the usual rhetoric about the vices of the pagans and the virtues of the Christians, the falseness of which I show in another book (Little Blue Book, No. 1078).

All this rhetoric is based upon the most scandalously loose quotation of particular instances. Even the best Christian writers ask us to blush at the crimes of Nero or Elogabalus, and never mention that during three-fourths of the Em-

pire its rulers were good men. They say dark and vague things about the vices of Messalina and Faustine (which are grossly exaggerated), and they never tell that there were ten good pagan empresses for every bad one. They quote St. Jerome about the virtue of his score of Christian pupils, and they entirely ignore his assurance, in the same letters, that the Christian world generally was vicious and corrupt.

There was no such *general* contrast of pagan vice and Christian virtue; and the notion that at the adoption of Christianity the world passed from an era of vice to one of virtue, from a period in which woman was the toy of "brutal lusts" to a period in which she was respected because of her Christian virtues, is, as we shall see, one of the most fantastic and unjustifiable beliefs that zeal ever engendered.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE EFFECT OF CHRISTIANITY

Let me at once oppose to this frothy rhetoric, this fanciful construction of history by men who will not take the trouble to study the facts, the sober and deliberate testimony of a great lawyer, based upon the solid foundation of the actual tenor of the law.

I have quoted Sir Henry Maine's recognition of the position of justice and freedom won for women by the Stoic lawyers. "Christianity," he says (p. 156), "tended somewhat from the very first to narrow this remarkable liberty"; and "the latest Roman law, so far as it is touched by the Constitutions of the Christian Emperors, bears some marks of a reaction against the liberal doctrines of the great Antonine jurisconsults."

I try always to let my reader know what the best-informed religious writer or scholar would at each step say to my arguments and facts. For the mass of popular Christian literature I have too much disdain to answer it. It is appallingly untruthful; and, unfortunately, it is just from this literature that preachers and the great bulk of the faithful derive their ideas. Yet even the more scholarly Christian writer is apt to betray an inaccuracy of knowledge and a straining of the evidence which deprive his conclusions of value and entitle them to little or no respect. Here he would remind me that the new liberty of the Roman women was won

by weakening the institution of marriage, and that Christianity strengthened marriage and so fortified and uplifted the position of woman.

It is true that the freedom and the right to own property of the Roman women were won by an attack upon the old form of marriage (*confarreatio*). This ancient ceremony conferred upon the husband his despotic power over the wife, and no enlightened generation would preserve it. But Roman law and religion were, as they always are, conservative, and the ceremony was evaded rather than replaced. Looser forms of marriage were introduced. They were, however, recognized in law, and were as valid as a modern marriage. All that the Christian writer can mean, if he knows the facts, is that divorce was comparatively easy and frequent, and that the Church now came forward with the doctrine that the union of man and wife was a holy thing, a sacrament, an indissoluble association. Sir Henry Maine has this in mind chiefly when he speaks of the "reaction" caused by the Church.

And the distinguished Christian lawyer calls the change, in so far as there was any change—there was very little in the fourth century—a "reaction" not an "advance," because he knows well that it tended to restrict the rights of women without in the least securing for them greater respect.

Sir Henry Maine was no theologian. In point of fact, marriage was not a sacrament to the Christians of the fourth century. An ascetic priest here and there might publish the speculations of his dreamy hours about "sacraments,"



the Christian leaders generally might pour their disdain upon the flesh and its joys, but the great mass of the Roman people, even after their conversion to Christianity, regarded marriage and divorce as civic and human affairs, and did not listen to the clergy. The Church did not obtain control of marriage until the eleventh century. Until that time the clergy themselves were commonly married, and the laity had almost as much liberty of divorce as the pagans had had. I have written a special work on this subject, *The Influence of the Church on Marriage and Divorce* (1916), and carefully studied every phase of the transition.

The only meaning, therefore, that one can read into this common claim, that the Church won respect for woman, is that the religious writer supposes that the Church induced women to be more chaste and thus earn the respect of men.

This, as I amply show in other books, is a double untruth. It is a repetition of the threadbare legend of pagan vice and the discredited legend of Christian virtue. I have, I trust, amply shown that the charge against the Romans rests on vague and unsatisfactory grounds. I will merely give here one or two authoritative opinions. Dr. L. Friedlander is one of the highest authorities on the morals of the Romans. He was a Christian and a Puritan, yet in his classical *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Romo* (1,431) he says:

There is nothing to show that in Imperial Rome shamelessness ever went so far as it did in Paris about the middle of the last [the eighteenth] century.

And instead of Christian Paris the learned writer would have been still more confident of his case if he had taken Papal Rome in the tenth or the fifteenth century or Papal Avignon in the fourteenth century. Dr. Fairbairn, who is esteemed one of the most scholarly Christian writers on the subject, says that we "know not how destitute of true and generous action the Roman world was." And to this another Christian writer, Dr. Emil Reich, an historian who really knows and loves ancient Rome, replies with a vigor and irony which would do credit to a pagan:

It would be the easiest thing in the world to accumulate examples of the most tender charity practiced by these "immoral" Romans. . . . Justice in imperial Rome, in this rotten and diseased Rome, was administered in the most perfect way. We seldom or never hear a complaint over the injustice of judges or the injustice of the imperial chamber. The liberty of citizens, even the perfect safety of slaves, were protected by powerful laws. . . . These rotten Romans of the first three centuries, instead of dozing away in idle profligacy, were the founders of thousands of flourishing cities. . . . These rotten Romans protected everybody and persecuted nobody. . . . The innumerable nations under these diseased Romans felt so happy that they never, or very rarely, thought of revolting against a rule at once so mild and so profitable. (*The History of Civilization*, p. 371.)

I should like to quote in full the warm tribute to the Romans of this sincere believer in the Bible, but it is too long. And if you remind me that he seems to have overlooked all the terrible things which the poet Juvenal wrote about the rich women of Rome, I retort that Juvenal, a licensed satirist, wrote about a

class and generation which he knew not, and that so sober an authority as Sir Samuel Dill says that "in his [Juvenal's] own modest class female morality . . . was probably as high as it ever was, as high as the average morality of any age." (*Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 76.) As to the higher class, I may remind the reader that the Emperor Octavian sentenced his beloved daughter to exile for life—for adultery.

Whatever the proportion of virtue and vice in this pagan world was, there is not one single bit of evidence of improvement when Christianity triumphed. There is, on the contrary, ample evidence of actual deterioration. On the one hand, the pagan ideas so far remained that we find St. Augustine himself permitting a man to take a concubine into his home if his wife proves barren (*De Bono Conjugali*, XV: Augustine, of course, refuses a corresponding right to the wife of an impotent man); we find Paulinus of Pella boasting that he guarded "the treasure of chastity" and was "content with the enjoyment of the female slave of the house" (*Eucharisticos*, line 166); we find the First Synod of Toledo under the archbishop, laying it down in its 17th canon that a man who has a mistress, but not a wife also, may be admitted to communion. On the other hand, every contemporary Christian authority assures us that from the fifth century onward the morals of Europe suffered a swift, appalling deterioration.

Thus the main plea of the writers who try feverishly to show that the new religion improved the position of woman is demonstrably

false. Neither men nor women became more virtuous. We should, in fact, find any such service to woman reflected in the legislation of the Christian Emperors, and, as Sir Henry Maine says, every innovation in their laws tends to restrict woman's rights and liberties. I have in my work on marriage and divorce collected and analyzed such innovations as there were, and they constitute as Professor J. Muirhead says (*Historical Introduction to the Private Law of Rome*, p. 356) "a miserable chapter in the history of law."

After the severe verdicts of two such experts it is needless to dilate on the various changes of the law by Christian Emperors. Constantine restricted the grounds of divorce to three, but his successors allowed his law to lapse. Theodosius, the brutal and superstitious soldier who, as I describe in *The Triumph of Christianity* (Little Blue Book, No. 1110), bludgeoned the rival religions out of existence, applied the ideas of the clergy; and certainly no modern American will see anything but the most cruel harshness to woman in his enactments. He forbade the marriage of cousins; he imposed severe disabilities on any woman who married again after the death of her husband; he forbade a woman to remarry for five years, and then restricted her right to inherit, if she had divorced her husband for a very grave cause; and, if she divorced her husband for one of the lighter causes recognized in the law, she lost her dowry, she was strictly forbidden to marry again, and she was liable to a sentence of banishment. The husband, I may add, was, in

the same circumstances, permitted to marry again!

This is the new "fairness" to woman, as seen in the legislation of the most priest-ridden of all the Roman emperors. His laws were so brutal that his successors were compelled to repeal them, yet each in turn attempted some new interference with the right of divorce. In practice, during the whole of this period the people followed the old Roman custom of divorce by mutual consent, or for any of a dozen serious reasons. In the west the ruin of the Empire reduced everything to a chaotic condition. Synods of bishops repeatedly attempted to impose indissoluble marriage, but they failed. The prayer-books of the Anglo-Saxon Church as late as the ninth century recognize several grounds of divorce, and it was the same in France.

In the east, where Roman law continued in force, it was remodeled by Justinian, and six or seven specific grounds of divorce were admitted. It was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the clergy got control of marriage: with what awful results you may read elsewhere.

In point of historical fact, therefore, we find little more than the failure of the Church during seven or eight centuries to achieve what it proposed to do: to set up indissoluble marriage. Its real influence was apart from legislation, and we must ask how far its teaching was calculated to improve, or did in fact improve, the position of woman.

The crop of feminist literature which the

rapid progress of the women's movement brought into existence a few years ago contains more than one work of a Christian character. As I will tell in the last chapter, this task had been for decades left almost entirely to non-Christian writers and agitators. In their books—the works of Mrs. Cady Stanton, Mrs. Gage, A. Bebel, etc.—the grievance against the Christian religion was very frankly, if not very vehemently, expressed. Neither Jesus nor any follower of Jesus before the nineteenth century had helped woman; and even in three quarters of the nineteenth century, in spite of the flagrant degradation of woman's position, very few Christians—and the world was still overwhelmingly Christian—and no clergymen would open their lips. In spite of them the movement thrived, and then Christian accounts of the evolution of woman's position and her debt to Christianity began to appear.

I have one of the most orthodox of these before me, and I seek with some interest the page in which the lady describes woman's indebtedness to Christ. It is amusing. Jesus, it seems, insisted that man and woman were equal, because he described them as "twain in one flesh." I should have thought that Christian delicacy would prevent any lady from trying to read a mystic meaning into that very broad remark.

Next we are reminded that after his resurrection Jesus appeared *first* to a woman: which is one of the least historical statements in the latest parts of the Gospels. Thirdly, and this completes the case, we are reminded that Jesus

saved an adulterous woman from death and bade her "go, and sin no more": which is one of the most flagrantly apocryphal stories in the New Testament, for any such interference with the course of Jewish law would have been drastically resented. The writer discreetly omits to notice that in text after text Jesus speaks harshly of his mother, and in no single text has he a tender or affectionate word for her.

Jesus, the dreamer who saw the end of the world close at hand, the ascetic who saw in the sweet charm of woman only a snare of the devil, never troubled for a moment about woman's position. Not one word of his was calculated to affect it. The gospel-writers, it is true, attribute to him certain words about divorce (not mentioned by the Protestant lady to whom I have just referred) which have had a profound influence on woman; but these words are given in two contradictory versions, and this plainly shows that they are merely the interpolated opinions of two rival schools in the early Church. The Jews themselves in the time of Jesus were divided as to whether divorce should be permitted for adultery or entirely forbidden. The quarrel passed on into Christianity. What the devout Christian ought to ask himself is, why Jesus, who (he believes) foresaw all things, permitted this ambiguity on a fundamental issue to be given to the world in his name?

On this, however, we will not linger. Protestant America in practice rejects both versions of the words of Jesus. The indissolubility of



marriage, or even the restriction of divorce to adultery, is so patent a cause of immorality that whether Jesus said it or no, the good Protestant demands a more proper and humane and less disastrous rule of life.

I have said that Jesus never gave a thought to the question of woman's position, and it is usual to blame Paul for the profoundly mischievous spirit which got into the early Church. But Paul, here at least, does not differ from Jesus. It is the asceticism or puritanism of both that led to the degradation of woman. She is the chief implement used by the devil in his scheme of temptation. The gentle touch of her hair upon your cheek, the ripe lips that draw you, the tender pressure of her breasts, the white rounded limbs and finely molded neck—the devil smiles cynically in every one of her allurements, and the ascetic sees only that imaginary smile.

What Paul adds to this general asceticism is a reminder of the childish, yet fateful, references to woman in *Genesis*. She was made out of man, and for man; and she at once dragged him down from a state of semi-divine bliss to all the horrors and labors of earthly life. Man, says Paul, not only may, but must, remove his hat in church, "forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God"; but woman must veil her head, for she was made from man and for man, not in the image and likeness of God (*I Cor.* xi, 5-10). There is no need to quote Paul's other depreciations of woman; though, if there is anything in Christian tradition, he found the

devoted attentions of maids like Thecla very comforting amidst his labors.

We have only to glance over the works of the Fathers to see how these two ideas—the ascetic scorn of woman's sweetest ministry in life, her love, and the belief in her inferiority on account of her origin and her primary share in the fall—brought into the life of Europe the element which caused and explains the degradation of woman. Scores of these quotations from the Fathers are given in feminist histories, while even the Christian historians can find no pleasant or tender sentiment to put in the scale against these profoundly mischievous aphorisms.

Some of the quotations are inaccurate. Clement of Alexandria did not say, as Lecky quotes him, that fornication is but "a lapse from one marriage into many." St. Ambrose did not say that woman is plainly inferior since she was built out of a mere rib of man; for the work in which this is said is spurious.

But there remain scores—special research would find hundreds—of references to marriage and women which poured a poison into the blood of Europe. Already in the second century Justin pronounced that "a man who marries a divorced woman is guilty of adultery," and Athenagoras sneered at a second marriage as "a decorous sort of adultery." St. Basil said: "The wife will take back her husband when he returns to her from his whoring, but the husband will cast forth a sinful wife from his house." (*Ep. XIX, 21.*) Origen said that "di-

gamists are saved in the name of Christ, but are no means crowned by him."

Contempt of marriage is associated with contempt of woman. St. Gregory of Nazianzum, supposed to be the most tender and emotional—the least flinty, I should say—of the Fathers, gives counsel in poetic form to the maid Olympias. She is not to study philosophy, for "Woman's philosophy is to obey the laws of marriage." She must take no interest in public affairs or attend even innocent entertainments. She may marry, but "blessed is the man who soils not the divine image within him with the filth of concupiscence." And at last it comes:

Fierce is the dragon, cunning the asp:  
But woman has the malice of both.

Tertullian is almost as eloquent. For Christian women he writes a book *On the Adornment of Women*. What do *they* want with finery, he asks.

If, my beloved sisters, your faith were as firm as its eternal reward, no one of you, after learning of the living God and her own condition as a woman, would dare to seek gay apparel, but would dress in rags and remain in dirt as a sorrowful and penitent Eve.

And a few lines later he hisses this fine Christian sentiment: "Thou art the devil's gate, the betrayer of the tree, the first deserter of the divine law." Marriage, even, he says, is "a sort of fornication."

The learned Clement of Alexandria said: "It brings shame to a woman even to reflect of

what nature she is." Gregory the Wonder-worker said: "You may find one chaste man among a thousand, but not a woman." St. Ambrose said: "It becomes not the modesty of a maid to choose a husband." Paulinus of Nola invented the phrase "weaker vessel" on the ground that the devil found woman easier to tempt.

St. Augustine said, in his *Commentary on Genesis* (XIX) that "man was made to rule, woman to obey"; and in a second *Commentary* he asks with portentous seriousness why woman was created at all, and can find no decent answer. Possibly, he reflects, it was just part of the divine scheme to create a being of inferior personality so as to insure that the fall would take place!

His contemporary, St. Jerome, who was the spiritual director of the prettiest and wealthiest young ladies of the Roman Church, habitually scorned woman and all tender sentiment. Woman is "the root of all evil," and marriage is "good for those who are afraid to sleep alone at night." In one beautiful letter, which his lady pupils learned by heart, he says:

Though thy father cling to thee, and thy mother rend her garments and show thee the breasts thou hast sucked, thrust them aside with dry eyes to embrace the cross.

These were the sentiments which the great interpreters of the Christian message give to the world. At first, it is obvious, the world at large took little or no notice of them. But to say, in the face of them, that the new religion up-

lifted woman and taught men a respect for her which the pagans had not known is worse than empty rhetoric. It is stupid.

It is very little use to remind us how the Church exalted Mary. She was not placed even so high as Isis and Cybele. But the main point is that the special treatment of Mary did not affect women generally. There was to be no second Mary. Woman was the devil's gate, the cause of the curse and of Christ's death, the weaker vessel, the worst occasion of sin and damnation, and so on, except in one special case which no other woman could imitate.

Nowhere else is Christian rhetoric quite so insincere. I have shown that from Paul to Augustine all the Christian leaders used contemptuous language about woman, and no language, either of Jesus or any distinguished follower of his, can be quoted in the opposite sense. On the other hand, as we shall now see, the historical facts are as plain as facts can be. Woman was *not* uplifted, but she sank, when Europe became entirely and thoroughly Christian, to a position which she had not known throughout the whole history of civilization.

## CHAPTER V

## THE MIDDLE AGES AND WOMAN

It seems so very obvious, as I state the case, that Christianity deeply injured woman that the reader will wonder how its apologists sustain their claim. I have already explained this. They all stress the pardon of the adulterous woman by Jesus; though this is, as I said, a transparently apocryphal story, and it suggests the peculiar position that Jesus as man-God forgives adultery, but as God he punishes it with eternal fire. All, again, emphasize the new virtues which were taught to the world; and this is equally untrue. Catholics, in fine, make a point of the elevation of Mary; and they forget all about the still higher positions of Athene, Minerva, Juno, Isis, Cybele, etc.

But there is another way of making out a case. I think it is the German Socialist Bebel who tells his readers that in the year 585 A. D. a council of bishops, at Macon, solemnly debated whether woman had a soul. This is impossible, since, obviously, not even the most ignorant priest can doubt, or ever did doubt, that women as well as men are damned. So the apologist looks into this Council of Macon, and he triumphantly tells us that all that happened was just a little grammatical breeze as to whether the word "man" can include woman! That is how the case against the

Church is fabricated, he says. A great point is now made of this in apologetic literature.

I have looked up the account of this synod of Macon in the abominably written *Historia Francorum* of Gregory of Tours (ch. VII) and it is by no means clear that the bishops were merely quarreling about philology. A bishop, Gregory says, objected that the Latin word for "man" ought not to be used to include "woman." There are, as a fact, two Latin words, but here there is question of the generic word *homo*.

Now it is so obvious to even a first-year student of Latin that the word means "human being" that the point of this obstinate bishop is not at all certain. The other bishops had to convince him by such extraordinary arguments as the fact that Jesus is said in the New Testament to be the "son of man," yet he was the son of a woman! My impression is that, though no bishop could doubt that woman had a soul, this man was so impressed by the inferior and wicked nature of woman that he resented the inclusion of her in one word with man.

Another modern argument is that the acceptance (at the point of the bayonet) of Christianity by Europe coincided with the destruction of civilization by the northern barbarians. Goths and Vandals trod the whole Empire underfoot in the fifth century; and Goths and Vandals have actually become proverbial names for wreckers and destroyers. Is not this a sufficient explanation? The new law of Europe was a combination of the old law with the laws of the invaders.

It sounds plausible, and it is quite false. If there was one single point in which the Goths



and Vandals were not barbarians it is their respect for woman. Centuries earlier the Roman historian Tacitus had held up the "Germans" as models in this respect for the Romans themselves. Instead of the claim for Christianity finding any relief here, it is doubly discredited. The apologist has now to explain how the Goths and Vandals lost all their old respect for woman as well as explain the loss of all woman's rights and privileges under Roman law.

There is no need to attempt here to trace the gradual descent of woman. Her position at the beginning of the nineteenth century is enough. It was a legacy from the Middle Ages. Pagan Rome had made of her a personality. Christian Rome degraded her to a chattel, a dependent, a weaker vessel, a wholly inferior creature. From the fifth century onward she sank steadily, though differently in different countries.

In England women had a good deal of political influence—I mean women of the noble families—almost down to the Reformation; though the position of the mass of the women throughout the Middle Ages was vile. In most countries the days of chivalry, which were plainly due to the old pagan spirit of the Teutons, maintained for a time the position of the aristocratic women. Incautious Catholic writers sometimes quote this age of chivalry as one of the proofs that their religion won respect for woman. All that they know about it, as a rule, is from Tennyson's puritanical version of the legendary King Arthur and his legendary knights. Chivalry was a glorification of lust, the lust of fighting and the lust of love. If a woman was pretty and aristocratic, she met very courtly deference. If she was aristo-

cratic and not pretty, she had a worse time than the Greek matron had had. If she was pretty and not aristocratic— Well, the adventures of Rebecca in Scott's *Ivanhoe*, which comes nearer to the historical truth than Tennyson's pretty *Idyls*, fairly illustrate her chances in life.

In short, this argument from chivalry is one more good illustration of the feebleness and carelessness of all religious arguments. As I said, a beautiful and noble woman had quite a good time. Knights fought for her "favors." You may or may not trace the influence of Jesus of Nazareth either in the fight—which was a real deadly combat—or in the tender reward of the victor, but it is more important to keep *this* clearly in mind: not one woman in tens of thousands during the age of chivalry got the least advantage from its amorousness. You pick out the baron's pretty wife or daughter and remind us of the knights bowing to the dust before her; and you say nothing whatever about the wives and daughters of the ten thousand serfs or yeomen, or even craftsmen and merchants. *Their* life could be hell. *They* were protected neither by law nor religion against the "lusts" of these very hot-blooded and masterful knights. And then you boast about the religion of the brotherhood and equality of men!

There has been a good deal of talk about the medieval *jus primae noctis*: the right of the lord to have the peasant-bride in his own bed for the first night, or the first few nights, after the wedding. Someone discovered that there was such a right in medieval Europe, and for a time it figured as an important item in the indictment of the Christian Middle Ages. Now, religious writers say, it has all been exploded.

"Modern historians" find that there was no such right. The Church has been libeled, as usual.

There was no libel whatever. The *jus primae noctis* was for centuries, and over a large part of Europe, a recognized institution. Sometimes it was the bishop or abbot who had the right to the bride for a night; if his retainers reported her a virgin and attractive to the episcopal palate. As late as the sixteenth century we find the French peasantry rebelling against the odious custom. It was well known in medieval England. It was not generally a formal law for the simple reason that barons and abbots did not dream, as a rule, of waiting until the peasant's daughter married. She was rarely a virgin when she did marry. Bede, the English clerical chronicler, tells us that in his time in England it was the custom for the lord to take to his harem any attractive peasant girl on his lands, then sell her when she became pregnant. There was hardly such a thing as chastity in Europe during the Middle Ages. A wench was a wench. Does anybody imagine that a peasant or a smith would "go to court" in the Middle Ages when a soldier or a noble manhandled his daughter?

Mrs. Cady Stanton hardly exaggerates when she says that "mankind touched the lowest depths of degradation" in the medieval treatment of women. The brutality and grossness which the Church suffered to spread over Europe were bound to degrade woman when the strong arm of Roman law no longer protected her. Europe had undergone one of the most amazing transformations in history. Streams of barbaric Goths and Vandals had poured all over it. Their fertility seems to have been

stupendous. They crossed into Africa and swamped the Roman province of north Africa as well as Spain. Law and justice and education disappeared. The barbaric chief became a feudal noble, and was a law to himself. His women became as loose and vicious as any wealthy Roman woman who had ever lived. "Conjugal morals returned to brutality," says Legouv  , the historian of female morality (*Histoire morale des femmes*, p. 183.)

No one questions that several centuries of moral chaos, of the densest ignorance and most unbridled license and violence, followed the Christianization of Europe. But how, I am asked, could one expect the Church to tame at once these myriads of hot-blooded barbarians from the north and the mixed population they bred everywhere in Europe? The answer is quite easy, as far as the treatment of woman is concerned. The pagan myths of these barbarians *had* persuaded them to treat woman with respect. If you hold that the Christian myth was even more favorable to women, how is it that it entirely failed where paganism had succeeded? The plain truth is that the old Teutonic religion had taught men that woman is a superior being, and Christianity taught exactly the opposite. One modern historian has gone so far as to say that the Goths and Vandals embraced Christianity *because* it taught the inferiority of woman! They now had a free run.

It is at all events clear that the teaching of the Fathers continued to be the belief of the bishops; that is to say, when they happened to be really religious, which was not often. It was precisely the best Christians, the men most eager to apply Christian doctrine to life, who

damned woman. All through the period of chaotic transition from Roman civilization to the later civilization of Europe we find gatherings of bishops depreciating women; like the Council of Auxerre, in 578, which said that women must not, like men, take the sacramental cup in their own hands because they are "impure."

The decrees of these Councils of bishops and of the Popes make up what is called Canon Law or Church Law. When Europe settled down again to a rudimentary sort of civilization, its law consisted of fragments of the old Roman law and the native laws of the barbarians with a good deal of Canon Law. The Church was all-powerful. Abbots and bishops were dispensers of justice.

Now both the Roman and the barbaric laws had been favorable to woman, yet the new law of Europe was grossly unjust to her. It was then that she was legally and socially degraded; that she lost control of her person and property, lost her legal personality, and lost all respect except that which a man pays to the woman whose caresses he desires. Sir Henry Maine and every other authority trace the degradation to the Church law. Maine says:

No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law; but the proprietary disabilities of married females stand on quite a different basis from their personal incapacities, and it is by the tendency of their doctrines to keep alive and consolidate the former that the expositors of the Canon law have deeply injured civilization.

Sir Henry shows that the British law which, through colonial days, was responsible for the state of things in Boston as late as 1850, which

I described in the first chapter, owes all its enormities to church law, and therefore to Christianity. And no one with the least authority on the subject questions this. One of the recent feminist historians who certainly does not write from an anti-clerical point of view, Mrs. G. Hill, says:

Although women appear to have had a wider field of activity than they afterwards enjoyed when social life became more complex, there was a counteracting influence which told against the development and free exercise of their energies. This was the influence of the Church. It was the policy of the Church to keep women in a subordinate position. (*Women in English Life*, p. vii.)

The "wider field of activity" in the Middle Ages means that all sorts of trades were open to women. Some, like brewing, were almost monopolized by them. As the population was kept almost stationary by war, famine, and disease, there was no sex rivalry in work. Women have always had liberty to work. Let us grant man that.

When Mrs. Hill and others remind us that women might become abbesses—a new trade opened by Christianity—one must again deplore the lack of sense of proportion. For every abbess who had a little power there were tens of thousands of women whom the Church had degraded to the level of children or cattle. It is as if the world had discovered what *Genesis* really taught. "Male and female created he them," says the English Bible. But the Hebrew word for "female" is, literally, "A thing to be perforated." That was all woman had become. You may say that the Church provided an escape from all the brutality: the nunnery. Alas, most nunneries during the Middle Ages were totally corrupt. In any case,

it is a rather curious service to the race to make a country desolate and then provide one or two quiet retreats amidst the desolation.

The monastic idea was, in fact, hastening the degradation of woman. One of St. Bernard's monks was implored by his parents to return, and the saint wrote for him a letter to the parents which includes such gems of Christian sentiment as this:

What have I to do with you? [He uses the very words of Jesus to his mother.] What have I received from you but sin and misery? Only this corruptible body that I bear do I confess that I hold from you. Is it not enough for you that you have brought me into this miserable world; that you, being sinners, have begotten me in sin; that, being born in sin, you have nourished me in sin; but you must envy me the mercy of God I have obtained, and wish to make of me a son of hell? You may choose to neglect your own salvation, but why should you wish also to destroy mine?

This is the third in the official collection of Bernard's letters; and Bernard was the very flower of Christian piety in the early Middle Ages. But it is needless to brood any longer over the period of woman's degradation. It was in every respect except art a foul period, a state of semi-barbarism; and, while the Church can be indicted only for *permitting* the hourly violence, the fearful cruelty, the sordid ignorance, the universal exploitation, the incredible filth and disease, and the almost equally incredible growth of prostitution and monastic hypocrisy, it has a direct and clearer responsibility for the injustice to woman.



## CHAPTER VI

## THE CLERGY AND THE MODERN STRUGGLE

After about the year 500 "human life was suspended for a thousand years," says a brilliant French writer. Something like that certainly, will be the unanimous verdict of historians when our scholars have shed the last trace of subservience to the clergy. At present some of them have an affectation of showing that the Middle Ages were not quite so bad as the older historians had said. It is wrong, it appears, to call the early Middle Ages "the Dark Ages," because, by diligent search, we can find a lamp in it here and there!

But we may see enough about the Middle Ages in other books. As far as our present subject, the degradation of woman, is concerned, no one is quite so foolish as to try to defend the Church. By the year 300 A. D. woman was in a position of freedom and respect. She had enjoyed that position throughout nearly the whole four thousand years of civilization. After the year 500 A. D.—allowing two centuries for the application of the principles of the new religion—woman fell to a state of degradation which has no parallel in the history of any pagan nation. For more than a thousand years, during which Christianity absolutely dominated the life of man, she remained in that condition of degradation. That requires a good deal of explaining if you are reluctant to admit the obvious fact—Christianity degraded woman.

And there is no room here for the familiar quibble that it was not Christianity, but the men who professed it, that injured woman. It was quite plainly the doctrine. It was the morbid puritanism about love and the legends

of *Genesis*. The men who most drastically relegated woman to an inferior position were the men whom the Churches regarded as their religious heroes and oracles. The perfectly attired modern preacher in a "Fifth Avenue Chapel" somewhere will scarcely venture to say that he knows more about Christianity than did St. Gregory, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, or St. Bernard.

Nor is there any room for the further familiar quibble, that it took the world a long time to realize the true implications of the Christian spirit. Modern Christianity, wherever it makes this claim, has not discovered a new meaning in the words of Jesus, but has *disowned his teaching*. The medieval and Catholic doctrine of monasticism is a perfectly sound implication of Christ's teaching. Jerome and Athanasius, and all genuine monks and nuns, did exactly what Christ advised. The Fundamentalist is in this respect a Modernist. He rejects whole chunks of the teaching of Jesus and Paul just as cheerfully as he rejects the prediction of the end of the world. Christian teaching—the teaching of Jesus and Paul—implied that woman was inferior, that her moral weakness handed the race over to the devil and lost us paradise, and that her sweetest charms are so many baits on the devil's hooks.

The emancipation of woman was impossible as long as people really believed the teaching of Jesus and Paul. A well-known preacher once showed me, with some pride, a sermon of his on the woman question. The text was one of St. Paul's consecrated bits of rudeness to woman, and the sermon then began: "That is where Paul and I differ." Precisely.

The true story of woman's recovery of the

position she had held under paganism can be told in a few lines, and it is actually more significant and instructive when it is so told. From the fifth to the fifteenth century, from the death of Hynatia to the time of Petrarch at least, no one had a good word to say for woman. Not a scholar in Christendom, not a priest or writer, was inspired to make a syllable of protest against the disgraceful injustice of the system. It was the literary men of the Renaissance who began to raise woman—the woman of their class—to a position of equality; and the Renaissance was, notoriously, the rebirth of paganism and skepticism.

Then came the Reformation and what Catholics humorously call "the Christian Renaissance," or a half-hearted attempt to reform the morals of Rome under the lash of Protestantism. Europe became again intensely interested in religion. Many millions of people cut each other's throats in the name of religion. The civilization of Europe was put back a hundred years by the zeal for religion. And the attempt to emancipate woman was at once crushed.

The opinions of feminist writers about the effect of the Reformation vary remarkably. Out of six which lie before me Mrs. Cady Stanton regards the Reformation "one of the most important steps," and Mrs. Gage thinks that the anti-Christian bias against woman "took new force after the rise of Melanchthon, Huss and Luther." Lecky believes that, in restoring the credit of marriage, the Reformers rendered a great service, and Professor Karl Pearson finds that they caused a material increase of prostitution—which is impossible in the opinion of anybody who knows the Catholic Middle Ages—and darkened the prospect for woman.

Most of these writers argue from a theoretic-

cal point of view. Luther gave a shrewd and healthy blow at the Catholic glorification of virginity and all the hypocrisy caused by it—but he also said such things as: “No gown worse becomes a woman than the desire to be wise.” To say that he robbed women (how many?) of opportunities by suppressing nunneries is fatuous; but he certainly provided no other opportunities for them. The “three K’s” (*Kirche, Kuche, Kinder*—church, children, and kitchen) were stereotyped as the ideal of the German woman.

The Reformation did nothing for women on the continent of Europe. In England, in the Elizabethan age, educated women (a tiny minority) had more freedom, socially, though they lost their last hold on public life. But their new freedom was plainly due to the fact that in England the Reformation and the Renaissance occurred together. The Reformers, through a statute of Henry VIII, forbade “women and others of low condition” to read the Bible. The Humanists invited them to read.

But the historical facts are clear enough. Protestantism, of a pure or Puritanical type, was as deadly to woman as Catholicism. What did she get from the Puritans of England or New England? From the Calvinists of Switzerland? From the Lutherans of Germany and Scandinavia? Nothing whatever. Protestant divines were as blind to the injustice of the system as Catholic divines were. The service of Protestantism was indirect; and I would stress that in this sense it was mighty. It smashed the tyranny of Rome and could not set up a lasting tyranny of its own. Yet to use a phrase of Emerson’s in a different connection, Luther would, if he had foreseen the revolt of the women, have cut off his right hand

rather than nail his theses to the door of the cathedral.

This is the stark truth about the redemption of woman from all the injustices which Christianity had brought upon her. *Not one single Christian clergyman the world over raised a finger in the work until it had so far succeeded that the clergy had to save their faces by joining it.* No amount of pulpit rhetoric, no amount of strained apology from Christian feminist writers, can lessen the significance of that fact. And to it you must add another of equal significance: *The men and women who started the revolt against the injustice and carried it to the stage of invincibility were non-Christian in the proportion of at least five to one.*

Take the movement in America. Three of its greatest leaders, Mrs. Cady Stanton, Mrs. Gage, and Miss Susan B. Anthony have described it minutely and conscientiously in their monumental *History of Woman Suffrage*. It began in 1820, when Frances Wright, a Deist, a pupil of the British Agnostic Robert Owen, invaded the States. She was joined by the brilliant Ernestine L. Rose, a Polish Jewess who had cast off all theology; by Lucretia Mott, a Quaker whose views were regarded as "heresy" even in the Society of Friends; by Abby Kelly, another Rationalistic Quaker; and by the sisters Grimke, also Quakers. I have shown in my *Biographical Dictionary of Distinguished Rationalists* that Mrs. Cady Stanton, Mrs. Gage, and Miss Anthony, who led the fight in the next generation, were all Agnostics. And for fifty years, as this detailed history shows, the clergy of America were the most deadly enemies of the movement, basing their opposition expressly upon the Bible.

I smiled when, in 1917, I was invited to speak for the movement in New York. It was then respectable. Parsons were available by the score. Few women in the movement had ever heard of Fanny Wright or Abby Kelly or Ernestine Rose and the other splendid pioneers. None knew of the time when pastoral letters had circulated amongst the American clergy calling their attention to "the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury." That was all over. Preachers were now assuring them that Christianity was the best friend, the only friend, that woman had ever had!

It was the same everywhere. In Britain the pioneers were Mary Wollstonecraft, Fanny Wright, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau—all Rationalists—supported by Godwin, Robert Owen, Jeremy Bentham, G. J. Holyoake, and J. S. Mill—all Agnostics or Atheists. In Germany the work was done by Max Stirner, Karl Marx, Büchner, Engels, Bebel, and Liebknecht—all Atheists. In France it was Sièyes and Condorcet—Atheists—who first pleaded for the emancipation of woman, and George Sand, Michelet, Saint-Simon, and Fourier—all deep-dyed heretics—who raised the plea again in the nineteenth century. In Scandinavia Ibsen and Bjørnsen and Ellen Key—all Rationalists—lead the protest.

Let the women of the world read their remarkable story once more, with open eyes. They will. . . . No, not yet. But a time will come when the women of America—and it may be this generation in your high schools today—will put away forever, not ungently, the figure of Christ: will burn Paul in effigy: and will raise a superb monument to Voltaire.







